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Proud of America!**

THE **epicenter**

Newsletter of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS) • December 2003

VA Palo Alto Health Care System Patient Education and Service Kiosk Awarded Grand Prize

Congratulations is extended to Leonard Goldschmidt, MD, PhD, Medical Director, Telemedicine and Medical Informatics for his entry in the 2002 California Pacific Medical Center Award for Excellence in Patient Education titled, "The Patient Education and Service Kiosk: Health Information at the Point-of-Care." Out of 153 submissions nationwide, many from the most prestigious medical institutions, the field was reduced to 18 finalists. Dr. Goldschmidt's project was selected the grand winner.

The goals of the original project were threefold: 1) to create an easy to use health education resource for the patient waiting area, 2) to provide trustworthy multimedia health education content, with medication information, vouchers for clinical care and access to selected health web sites, and 3) to improve compliance with clinical guidelines, in this case diabetic eye and foot exams and flu and pneumonia immunizations. The kiosk was designed and funded as a research project by the California Telemedicine and Telehealth Association in 2000, in collaboration with VA Palo Alto and San Joaquin County

Hospital. Therefore, much of the content is narrated in either English or Spanish. Easy-to-use touch-screen menus provide diverse information on diabetes, disabilities and heart disease, monitoring cholesterol, preventing back pain, cancer, stroke, and high blood pressure, as well as travelers tips for staying healthy. Another module, disease treatments, medications and vitamins, are databases licensed from a national vendor, but seamlessly integrated into the kiosk design. After viewing educational content such as information on flu and pneumonia immunizations, patients can print vouchers good for these clinical services, as well as schedule diabetic eye and foot examinations and mental health visits. Patients can also use the kiosk touch-screen to access health related web sites, with an online keyboard available as needed. Recently, the ability to order a



*Dr. Goldschmidt
demonstrating kiosk to
veteran.*

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A Word From Our Director



**Elizabeth Joyce Freeman, Director
VA Palo Alto Health Care System**

I want to express my appreciation for the outstanding progress we made in FY 2003 in meeting our performance goals. Dr. Sheikh, our Chief of Staff, John Sisty our Associate Director and Pat Allyn, our Chief, Quality Management, and I met with Dr. Wiebe, Director of the VA Sierra Pacific Network, on October 31, 2003, to review our performance. Dr. Wiebe was extremely complementary of our

overall performance, especially in our outstanding inpatient and outpatient satisfaction scores, our meeting five of the six waiting time goals, and our stellar performance in the efficiency and special emphasis measures. My thanks to all the performance measure champions and the staff who worked so diligently to meet these measures.

Many of you have been assigned as champions for FY 2004 performance goals. In addition, we will begin some longer range planning efforts in January. These efforts will be part of updating our three-year strategic plan and will complement, rather than compete with our efforts to prepare for our JCAHO survey in March 2004. As many of you know, March 29, 2004, is the tentative start date for our survey under the new TRACER methodology. Many front line staff will be questioned regarding the JCAHO 2004 National Patient Safety Goals. These include:

- Patient identification
- Communication among caregivers
- High-alert medications
- Wrong-site surgery
- Infusion pumps
- Clinical alarm systems
- Nosocomial infections

Many staff including Quality Management and Nursing Service staff will be providing educational assistance to all of us in articulating the many efforts we have made to meet these goals. Thank you all in advance for the work you are performing continuously in meeting the JCAHO and other accrediting agency standards.

We were honored with a visit from Secretary Principi to the Livermore Division on November 25, 2003. The Secretary met with VAPAHCS leadership and the staffs of numerous Congressional members, toured the Livermore Division and met with numerous veterans and veteran service organization representatives. The Secretary was very impressed with the staff and the commitment they demonstrated to providing outstanding care to veterans. I know this process has created much anxiety across our health care system. I very much appreciate the respectful manner in which everyone interacted with Secretary Principi during his visit. We were able to discuss both the advantages and disadvantages of the Livermore realignment proposal with him at length. The CARES Commission will send him their recommendations December 18, 2003. The Secretary will make his decision in early 2004.

In January 2004, we will lose three highly valued members of our administrative leadership. Cliff Schem, Chief Engineering Service, will be transferring to a position in the National Cemetery Administration; Sandra Fischer, Chief Human Resources Service, will be transferring to a position in VISN 22; Glenn Endsley, Chief of Voluntary Service, will be retiring. I have worked with Cliff and Glenn since 1995 and greatly admire and appreciate their countless contributions to VAPAHCS. After working with Sandy over the past year plus, she has proven her commitment to improving our HR services and demonstrated her willingness to assist in many special projects. I wish each of them the very best in their new endeavors and thank them for the many, many times they worked so selflessly to improve this health care system.

Finally, let me wish all of you safe and enjoyable holidays and much success in the new year.

Elizabeth Joyce Freeman
Director



Secretary Principi Visits VA Palo Alto Health Care System

On Tuesday, November 25, 2003, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi visited the VA Palo Alto Health Care System, Livermore Division as part of a promise to see first hand facilities that could be realigned under the Capital Asset Re-alignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) plan. Principi met with senior management, congressional representatives, and toured Building 62 and 90. Following the tour he met with veteran service organization officials and addressed the media.

The CARES Commission will present their recommendations to the Secretary on December 18, 2003. Secretary Principi will make his decision on the national CARES plan January 2004.



ASHES Names Fitzgerald 2004 President-Elect



The American Society for Healthcare Environmental Services (ASHES) announces that Thomas J. Fitzgerald II, CHESP, Chief, Environmental Management Service has been elected society president-elect for 2004.

Fitzgerald became a member of ASHES in 1997. Since he joined the society, he has served on the Membership Committee and the Certification Task Force. His responsibilities

at Palo Alto include environmental sanitation, pest control, laundry, linen, waste management, recycling and more for a 903 bed health care system.

"I am committed to environmental excellence and member/customer satisfaction," said Fitzgerald. "I will strive to enhance

our members' knowledge base, our service delivery to our hospitals and communities, our continued personal and professional growth and recognition, increased ASHES organizational exposure, growth in membership and certification numbers and activities."

ASHES, of the American Hospital Association, is the premier professional association for environmental services, housekeeping, waste management and textile care professionals in the healthcare industry. ASHES provides educational programs, opportunities to network with peers on a national level, recognition for personal and professional achievements, as well as affiliation and collaboration with the American Hospital Association on public policy and advocacy issues related to environmental services.

Fitzgerald's term will begin on January 1, 2004.

McCormick Named New Chief of Business Office

On November 14, 2003, Debbie McCormick joined VAPHCS as the new Chief, Business Office. In this position, she is responsible for administering the Business Office programs and activities, including medical care cost recovery (MCCR), fee basis, admission and health care benefits, and data management. The Business Office is a key service with intake sites at the Palo Alto, Menlo Park, Livermore Divisions and the San Jose and Monterey Clinics.

McCormick brings over 20 years of VA experience to her new position. She began her VA career in 1978 working at the VA Medical Center in Chillicothe, Ohio, where she held a variety of administrative and supervisory positions. After earning a bachelor's degree in business communication at Ohio University in 1996, McCormick left the VA to pursue a graduate

degree. In 1998 she earned a Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership with emphasis in Communication from Regent University. Following graduation, she worked at the University of Virginia as an in-house consultant in the field of process improvement and was instrumental in improving processes related to the central business office functions of the university. In 2000, McCormick returned to VA when she accepted a position at VAPAHCS as an ambulatory program specialist in Nursing Service. In 2002, she transferred to the VA in Salisbury, North Carolina, as the chief of health benefits, eventually earning the position as assistant chief, health administration service. Before returning to Palo Alto, McCormick successfully completed requirements to graduate in December 2003 from the premier class for the VISN 6 Leadership Development Institute.

EMPLOYEE NEWS

New Employees

Anesthesiology Svc.
Kim Cooper

Blind Rehabilitation Svc.
David J. Van Mantgen

Director's Office
Michelle Castro

Engineering Svc.
Paul G. Dibari

Environmental Mgmt. Svc.
Mary E. Dew

Medical Svc.
David P. Ang

Nursing Svc.
Isabelita A. Libaste
Michael Porter
Walderma R. Weaver

Nutrition & Food Svc.
Carlos Gonzalez

Pharmacy Svc.
Eric Fernando

Readj Counseling Svc.
Anita C. Foss

Research Svc.
Forest J. Baker
Adrienne Loero

V.A. Canteen Svc.
Robert A. Ross

Retirees

Patricia Derby (23)
Nursing Svc.

Bonnie Lubich (34)
Business Office

*(Years of service are
indicated in parentheses.)*



Employee Service Awards

10 Years

Nestor Castro
Nursing Svc.

Daniel Chatel
Psychology Svc.

Pamela Coyne
Nursing Svc.

Suzanne Diwa
Pathology & Laboratory Svc.

Rowena Encinas
Nutrition & Food Svc.

Annette Galinski
Nursing Svc.

Ronald Robinson
Psychology Svc.

15 Years

Dorothy Blake
Nuclear Medicine Svc.

Mary Buysse
Nursing Svc.

Singa Krishnamoorti
Psychiatry Svc.

Marites Purganan
Nursing Svc.

Melburga Senot
Nursing Svc.

Lisa Tagata
Nursing Svc.

Myrel Willeford
Police Svc.

20 Years

Carmencita Legaspi
Chief of Staff

Steven Lovett
Psychology Svc.

Joy Sakamoto
Psychology Svc.

Jeanne Schumann
Nutrition & Food Svc.

25 Years

Danilo Dangca
Fiscal Svc.

Pat Hines
Nursing Svc.

Ken Tipton
Chief of Staff

30 Years

Gordon Allen
Acquisition & Materiel
Mgmt. Svc.

Patricia Grover
Nursing Svc.

Gary Hamel
Nursing Svc.

Louis Moffett
Psychology Svc.

Charles Vasile
Blind Rehabilitation Svc.

35 Years

Ronald Powell
Nursing Svc.

Joseph Russo
Director's Office

Hispanic Heritage Month Recognized!

During the month of September, VAPAHCS held three programs recognizing Hispanic Heritage Month. A special thank you to new Hispanic Special Emphasis Program Manager, Juanita Morales-Euresti, and the following employees who have actively participated in this year's activities and supported the Hispanic Special Emphasis Program (SEP) goals:

John Aboytes, Alice Espindola, Ana Hammons, Raul Luna, Elena Krivy, Stevie Melendez, Stephen Roberts, Rosana Rosario, and Sam Sepulveda.

This year's program featured the Alvarez High School Ballet Folklorico Dancers (right) directed by Señor Jorge L. Palacios.

Food & Music were provided by Notipunto!



Celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 75th Birthday!

The VA Palo Alto Healthcare System invites you to participate in celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday during January, 2004. Sponsored by the EEO African-American Special Emphasis Program Committee, celebratory activities honoring the memory and legacy of Dr. King will take place in Palo Alto, San Jose, and Monterey.

Between 1955 and 1968, Dr. King helped change America. He brought to the world's attention how unfairly blacks were treated. His strong leadership and unprecedented power of speech gave people the faith and courage to work peacefully even when others did not. This led to new laws that ended the practice of keeping people of different backgrounds apart, making life fairer for everyone.

Dr. King knew all too well what it was like to be discriminated against. He recalled that, as a boy in Atlanta, GA., the curtains used on dining cars of trains separated white from black: "I was very young when I had my first experience sitting behind the curtain. I felt just as if a curtain had come down across my whole life. The insult of it I will never forget."

Dr. King rose to national prominence by organizing the successful 1955 Montgomery bus boycott, triggered by the arrest of

Rosa Parks for refusing to give her seat on a bus to a white person. By this time, the core of King's philosophy of nonviolent protest had been formed, based on the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi.

In the ensuing years, Dr. King employed various nonviolent, yet effective, means to effect change in our society. In 1963 he led a massive civil rights campaign in Birmingham, AL and organized drives for black voter registration, desegregation, and better education and housing throughout the South. In the same year Dr. King led the historic March on Washington, where he delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

Dr. King's efforts started as a struggle for equality of black people, but in the years since he died in 1968, he has come to symbolize the yearning of all people, regardless of race, to be free of injustice and intolerance. As Coretta Scott King said, "we are called on this holiday, not merely to honor, but to celebrate the values of equality, tolerance and interracial sister and brotherhood he so compellingly expressed in his great dream for America."

VAPAHCS – Dr. MLK Jr.'s Holiday Observances

January 16	PAD Auditorium	11:30 a.m.
January 19	MPD Auditorium	11:30 a.m.
January 23	LVD Recreation Room	11:30 a.m.

VAPAHCS Memories of 2003



Clockwise from upper left: Army award recipients; rose garden volunteers; Native American shaman performing ceremony at Menlo Park Division; San Jose disaster drill; 2003 Psychology interns; Menlo Park Division minimal sick leave award recipients; students from Lincoln High School visiting the morgue.



Holiday Safety

The winter holidays are a time for celebration, and that means more cooking, home decorating, entertaining, and an increased risk of fire due to heating equipment.

Facts & Figures:

In 1999, there were 370 Christmas trees fires in U.S. homes, resulting in 5 deaths, 60 injuries and \$15.7 million in direct property damage.

During 1999, candles in U.S. homes caused an estimated 15,040 fires, 102 civilian deaths, 1,473 civilian injuries and \$278 million in direct property damage.

Fourteen percent of the candle fires occurred in December, this is almost twice the 8% monthly average.

In 11% of the December candle fires, the fires began when a decoration caught fire. This was true in only 2% of the fires during the rest of the year.

Safety Tips:

Holiday decorating & lighting

Use caution with holiday decorations and whenever possible, choose those made with flame-resistant, flame-retardant or non-combustible materials.

Keep candles away from decorations and other combustible materials, and do not use candles to decorate Christmas trees.

Purchase only lights and electrical decorations bearing the name of an independent testing lab, and follow the manufacturer's instructions for installation and maintenance.

Always unplug lights before replacing light bulbs or fuses.

Carefully inspect new and previously used light strings and replace damaged items before plugging lights in. Do not overload extension cords.

Don't mount lights in any way that can damage the cord's wire insulation (i.e., using clips, not nails).

Keep children and pets away from light strings and electrical decorations.

Turn off all light strings and decorations before leaving the house or going to bed.

Holiday entertaining:

Unattended cooking is the leading cause of home fires in the U.S. When cooking for holiday visitors, remember to keep an eye on the range.

Provide plenty of large, deep ashtrays and check them frequently. Cigarette butts can smolder in the trash and cause a fire, so completely douse cigarette butts with water before discarding, or flush them down the toilet.

After a party, always check on, between and under upholstery and cushions and inside trash cans for cigarette butts that may be smoldering.

Keep matches and lighters up high, out of sight and reach of children (preferably in a locked cabinet). When smokers visit your home, ask them to keep their smoking materials with them so young children do not touch them.

Test your smoke alarms, and let guests know what your fire escape plan is.

VA Launches "Kids Page" on Internet

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has launched "VA Kids," a new Web page designed to help young people understand what it means to be a veteran.

"The ideals of military service and patriotism can be unfamiliar to some children and young adults," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi. "The VA Kids Web page supports President Bush's initiatives on education and volunteerism by providing an entertaining and informative way for young people to learn why veterans are special."

The Web page, at <http://www.va.gov/kids>, contains areas for students in kindergarten through grade 5, for grades 6 through 12 and for teachers. VA Kids also has information about VA, Veterans Day, scholarships, student volunteer opportunities,

rehabilitative and special events for disabled veterans and links to veteran-related sites.

For younger students, VA Kids has interactive activities such as puzzles, coloring pages, matching contests and age-appropriate language to describe a number of patriotic topics. For older students, there is information on volunteer programs, scholarships and more sophisticated educational resources, games and reference links. The teachers' section contains additional information, links and suggested classroom activities.

"The title 'veteran' is bestowed by a grateful nation on citizens willing to sacrifice everything to preserve our freedom," said Principi. "It is our responsibility to honor these heroes by ensuring that each American generation understands what this prestigious title means."

You Make a Difference!

Submitted by our veterans and their families.

We welcome more contributions from Livermore, Stockton, Modesto, Sonoma, San Jose, Monterey and Capitola.

We wish to commend **Dr. Hilary Keegan, Psychology Service, at the VA Clinic in Stockton.** She's helped us resolve some of our issues. Dr. Keegan has been outstanding in helping us find physicians, mental health providers, telephone numbers, prescription information, and much more. We also appreciate all the things afforded us by the VA on behalf of my husband.

This letter is one of heartfelt thanks to the **100-2C (PAD) staff** for the care provided to our veteran friend, by your staff over the past several weeks. Never have I seen a group of people more skilled, loving, and compassionate in their delivery of care to a patient and in their interaction with family members. There was never a time when anyone on your staff was not immediately responsive to patient needs or family members' questions. I was particularly touched to hear one of your nurses say at the end of her shift that she felt privileged to be providing her (the patient) care. I would like to mention in particular **Jane Bush, R.N., Nursing Service, Eileen Schleifer, R.N., Nursing Service, and Virginia Jackson, Chaplain Service.** Our community will certainly hear from me that yours is the Cadillac of end of life care.

I wish to commend **Betty Oharrow, R.N., Nursing Service, of the VA Monterey Clinic,** for the excellent job she does as a patient educator in the management of hypertension. I found the class informative, well presented, and very useful. She is an excellent instructor/educator and evidences a sincere interest and concern for her patients. My personal thanks to Betty for a job well done.

My mother dreads having her blood drawn anywhere, except at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System, Menlo Park Division. There she does not mind it because of **Mr. Gary Kittams, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Service.** He is so skillful and so gentle and each experience has been pleasant. His attitude seems to put patients first in everything he does. Bravo on your selection of staff.

I would like to acknowledge and thank **Sarah Jack, R.N., (PAD) Nursing Service, 100-4C,** for her kindness and professionalism with the care of our relative. Sarah always took time to be helpful to us and treated our relative with respect. He was not an easy patient. During the day we would stay with him trying to quiet him down and Sarah would always ask if we needed help and even spread a little cheer our way. She never missed a hello or a thank you. She is a wonderful person and we are very happy to have met her.

I was fortunate to be assigned **Dr. Alice Roszyk, Medical Service, Livermore Division** earlier this year. I am pleased with her compassionate approach to my medical needs. She has been a real asset to the staff and I appreciate the time she takes to discuss my problems and the options to better my health. My experiences at the Veterans Administration Hospital have been extremely positive and I am grateful to receive the treatment. I just want to say thanks and often it is not said enough.

I had a colon test at your hospital and it was wonderful. **Nurse Thelma Lee, R.N., Big Ben (Ben Franz, R.N.) Nursing Service - G.I. Clinic,** were superior in their services. Nurse Lee put in my I.V. and I really did not feel any pain. The surgeon I had, **Dr. George Triadafilopoulos, (PAD) Medical Service,** really put me at ease. And nurse Ben, I called Big Ben, was just beyond words. I just wanted you to know they are a great team.

I am sending a note of special thanks and appreciation to all the staff members involved in the **National Center - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder** at the **VA Palo Alto Health Care System, Menlo Park Division.** I really don't know how to thank you all, but I want you to know how much I appreciate all you did for me and all the brothers who have gone through the program. I have the utmost respect for all of you.

Service Kiosk *(continued from page 1)*

refill of patient's medication has become available, and it is the first time in VA that this is available on a kiosk. Without waiting in lines, patients can simply punch in their medication numbers, the order is transmitted to the pharmacy, and the medication is sent to them. All VISN 21 sites will soon have patient education kiosks with this feature. A patient feedback survey is

also a part of the kiosk and lets the designers know what patients think about the information and its uses.

Our goal, says Dr. Goldschmidt, "was to create an easy-to-use information system that was user-centered and lets patients take some control over their health and medical conditions. Patients decide what they want to learn and how much information they want."

December Word Search

J	O	L	L	H	G	I	E	L	S	W	I	G	I	L	I
T	A	P	P	L	E	M	E	R	R	H	A	N	U	K	K
R	W	F	C	H	A	K	K	U	N	A	H	S	A	N	T
A	I	C	H	R	I	S	A	D	A	S	O	P	S	A	L
S	G	N	I	T	E	E	R	G	S	N	O	S	A	E	S
L	I	S	L	R	C	H	I	L	H	I	R	Z	S	E	A
S	L	E	D	E	R	U	Y	P	N	F	N	R	U	D	O
G	I	I	R	E	A	L	L	S	A	A	A	W	A	K	Z
O	A	G	E	O	L	O	E	T	W	M	M	E	R	R	Y
N	E	H	N	O	D	T	N	K	E	I	E	T	R	E	N
G	G	O	J	U	T	A	N	O	N	L	N	L	A	S	P
G	C	H	R	I	S	T	M	A	S	Y	T	O	R	N	A
E	G	Y	A	D	S	A	L	O	H	C	I	N	S	T	M
G	F	E	L	I	Z	N	A	V	I	D	A	D	D	A	D
G	R	E	D	I	C	E	L	P	P	A	G	R	E	E	T

Find the following words in the letters above:

Apple Cider
Children
Christmas
Egg Nog
Family

Feliz Navidad
Hanukkah
Jolly
Kwanzaa
Las Posadas

Merry
Ornament
Poinsettia
Rudolph
Santa

Seasons greetings
Sleigh
St. Nicholas Day
Tree
Wigilia

VHA Accomplishments Calendar Year 2003

In calendar year 2003, VHA:

- Developed a \$4.6 billion, 20-year, plan to improve access, modernize facilities, and eliminate wasted and vacant space (CARES).
- Reduced the number of veterans who could not be screened within six months for non-urgent primary care and at 5 specialty care clinics from more than 300,000 to less than 40,000, even as the number of enrolled veterans increased by 300,000. We also reduced the time before the next available appointment from an average of 60 days to 24 days (for primary care) and from 62 days to 30 days (for specialty care). Our goal is to provide 90% of primary care patients with appointments within 30 days of the date they desire.
- Led the nation in eighteen of eighteen directly comparable health care indicators of quality in prevention and disease treatment.
- Had average Joint Commission for Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) quality survey scores exceeding the national average (93 to 91), and set the benchmark for patient satisfaction in the American Customer Satisfaction Index for Inpatient, Outpatient and Pharmacy care.
- Was recognized by the Institute of Medicine and numerous private and intergovernmental agencies for having one of the best integrated health information systems in the nation, including our framework for using performance measures to improve quality.
- Established a new employee and leadership succession program.



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by and for employees of the
VA Palo Alto Health Care System.

Submissions should be received by
the 1st working day of the month to
be included in upcoming issues.
Due to space limitations, it is not
possible to publish all submissions.

We welcome any comments,
suggestions or story ideas
you may have; please contact the
Communications Officer (00A) at
ext. 64888 or directly at
650-858-3925.

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